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General Comment

[Edited by Gilbert Campbell Scoggin, The University of Missouri.]

In *School and Society* for November 9, 1918, Professor Nutting calls attention to the fact that not all professed educational experts are sympathetic with the attempt to foist so many so-called vocational subjects upon our high schools. Many principals of schools are introducing these subjects with the belief that they are acting in accordance with a unanimous judgment, whereas Dr. Snedden thinks that a broad cultural course should precede training in any special vocation. Doubtless most other experts would agree with this opinion; but so much attention has been laid upon the vocational phase that the rank and file have been led to believe that the cultural side has been wholly discredited. At the same time Dr. Snedden doubts that the classics have a place even for cultural purposes in the high school, his doubt being based on the fact that so few students pursue Greek to a point where they secure mastery over the subject. While accepting this fact with reference to Greek, Professor Nutting argues for Latin, pointing out its cumulative advantages, such as the development of the language sense, the securing of a broad foundation for the Romance languages, its peculiar cultural value, and its training in the habits of application. It is certainly doubtful that any of the new subjects can offer so many different advantages. Even a short course in Latin is obviously of great worth. Thus Professor A. F. Lange, Director of the School of Education of the University of California, says: "Latin is an instrument through which pupils may learn to run their mental motors with accuracy and speed in more different ways, through more human situations, than is possible at present through any other available instrumentality; and it may be made the study *par excellence* for the executive type of mind." Dr. Snedden brings also the old charge that translations are often used by students, ignoring the fact that they are used by students of modern languages as well. The greater emphasis laid upon "unseens" in examination would go far toward removing complete reliance upon such a prop. Where the teacher is lax and the pupil lazy much evil may result from mental atrophy resulting from a slavish dependence on translation. It is a menace before the elements of a language are mastered. This question of translations is a very difficult one and the history of classical studies in our own country shows a curious wavering between extremes. There was a period when, under the influence of the Hamiltonian theory, interlinear translations were widely recommended and used. The following testimony from a successful schoolmaster, a man of recognized scholarship in his own day, will probably seem curious to most teachers of the classics. Dr. Samuel Parr, close friend of Porson and a master at Harrow, speaking of Martyn's well-known translations, says: "I learnt the *Eclogues* of Virgil from this very book, under my

revered instructor Dr. Thackeray, Master of Harrow School; and like other boys, I took it up with me to lesson. When a schoolmaster, I recommended this work to my scholars, as I also did the *Georgics* by Martyn; and I not only allowed but advised them to bring these books to lesson. The notes must have assisted and the English translation on the sides could protect no boy from my searching questions." I have quoted this to show how difficult it is to secure unanimity of opinion even in case of a question which at first sight may seem to admit of only one answer.

It cannot be repeated too often that the Rhodes Scholarships should be better known in the schools and colleges of this country. Much too little is done in the way of bringing them to the attention of pupils in the high schools and preparatory schools where foundations are laid. Such "advertising" as they have received has in large measure come from those who are hostile to the theory of Oxford training, based as it is upon a broad classical foundation. Some American educators have urged that the Oxford requirements be much modified in case of our Rhodes scholars, thereby attempting to remove the necessity of conforming to the educational system that Rhodes wished them to enjoy. Thus far comparatively little opposition has been made to the Latin requirement, but in case of Greek much hostility has been shown. This opposition has already been met more than half way, unwisely I feel sure, by the arrangement which provides that the candidate, after appointment to the scholarship, may make up the moderate Greek requirement.

Nothing can be more ridiculous than the appointment of a student who knows no Greek. Such an appointee can rarely put himself in a position to profit by the further study of Greek at Oxford. Even with the best American training in this subject he will find himself at considerable disadvantage in competition with the best scholars who yearly come up from the great public schools. But a very insidious effect of this compounding with the "barbarians" is the obvious suggestion to the candidates and to the appointee that Greek is of very slight importance and that this requirement may be met in this perfunctory manner. This of course is an attack against the whole system which Rhodes favored. He selected Oxford after a careful survey of the type of education fostered by the newer English universities, and Oxford was selected because it stood for just such things as our educators would remove.

The present international situation is fraught with peculiar dangers. The close, friendly association of England with our country during the war may lead to an overgenerous inclination to admit Rhodes scholars on their own terms, rather than to hold them strictly to the terms which she imposes upon inhabitants of Britain. No student should be appointed to a scholarship unless he is prepared to profit by the best that Oxford has to offer. If this type of training is not desired then the student should go elsewhere, and at the same time we should not forget that Rhodes purposely refrained from putting the choice of university in the power of his appointee. For advanced technical and scientific training a student does not need to leave this country.

It is the broad general training—universality, as Bacon aptly calls it—which should precede devotion to any special branch of knowledge that is so far to seek in our own educational system. This is the lesson that we should learn from Oxford. It is to be hoped that those who govern the destinies of Oxford and all it stands for will not be unduly influenced by any clamorous opposition to the classical requirements that may come from this side.

If there be any who have sincere doubts about the advantage to be derived by an American's residence in Oxford, such doubts should be removed by referring to any issue of the *American Oxonian*, the official publication of the former scholars on Rhodes's foundation. The intelligent, appreciative, and well-written contributions in that journal easily place it at the intellectual head of all our alumni magazines. Men whose interests are primarily in science generously acknowledge in this journal the great advantages they have received at Oxford. The dominant note is always breadth and thoroughness. If expert testimony is sought concerning the real value of such training, those who have enjoyed it should be allowed to cast the deciding vote.

Evidently it was the desire of Rhodes that his scholars should pursue the course leading to the A.B. degree. If a degree corresponding roughly to the Ph.D. should be introduced to satisfy an American demand, it is difficult to see what special advantage can come from studying at Oxford. Adequate facilities for this degree are available here at home. The introduction of such a degree carries hidden dangers for Oxford itself. The presence of a large number of students who, without a preceding broad foundation, are wholly bent upon pursuing some specialty, will be a constant menace to Oxford. Opportunity for highly specialized work is already available there for those capable of seizing it. The great weakness in our whole system is premature specialization and it is to England and France that we must look for suggestions of reform. Simon Newcomb said that he was never able to confine himself to astronomy to that exclusiveness which was necessary for becoming a specialist. Yet his name will always stand high in the annals of astronomy and at the same time he will be remembered in other fields of knowledge.

What are the features of Oxford training that have most impressed capable Rhodes scholars from this country? They may best be seen in a recent volume of essays by an old Rhodes man. In *The Oxford Stamp* Professor F. A. Aydellotte, of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, puts clearly and emphatically some of the things that are most striking to the American student on coming into residence. Among the points emphasized are sport, social life, intellectual conversation, and leisure. In America we are apt to think that ceaseless and feverish activity is indicative of mental accomplishment, whereas what we most need is an atmosphere of leisure for mental development. With all our hurry there is too much coddling of students who are thrown too little upon their own resources and responsibility. At Oxford the student works for himself and not for his tutor. There is less pretense in program and more individual effort. The student studies subjects